

8. Homeless Families

Perhaps the fastest growing segment of the homeless population has been homeless families and in particular, single parent families. The next table illustrates the trends from 1990 through 1998:¹

Sheltered Homeless Children & Families on a Given Night
31 January 1990 - 31 January 1998

Year	Families	Children
1990	53	108
1991	82	167
1992	118	233
1993	129	304
1994	194	340
1995	136	299
1996	148	349
1997	131	315
1998	104	240
1999	128	247

The number of homeless female heads of single parent families and their children is disconcerting, but has always been between 89 and 94 percent of the total number of single parents in homeless shelters and between 43 and 68 percent of the total families sheltered.

Perhaps the earlier growth in female single parent families can be attributed to an over-all increase of their numbers in Utah. In a 1986 report to the governor on poverty in Utah, the State Community Service Office (SCSO) reported that in 1960, only 6 percent of all families were female-headed. By 1983, that percentage had increased to 10. The 1990 census reveals that 17 percent of the households with one or more persons under 18 years are headed by female householders. This compares to 4 percent of households headed by a single male parent. In addition, the median income of females heading families in 1979 was 46 percent of that of males heading families—\$7,500 versus \$16,400.²

Many homeless female heads of single parent families are victims of domestic violence. Based on the 1986 survey, nearly 12 percent said they were homeless because of a "family conflict." No figures were collected about battered spouses in the January 1991 count, but on 31 July 1991, 44 sheltered homeless persons were reported to be battered spouses. In 1992 the average number on a given night was 46, which increased to 55 in 1993, 79 in 1995, and 69 in 1998. These numbers suggest that spouse abuse as a cause of homelessness is relatively constant.

¹The 1990 figures are based on the estimates of numbers of homeless children in Kerry William Bate, *Utah's Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Plan* (Salt Lake City: State Ad Hoc Homeless Planning Committee & Community Development Division, August 1990), p. 2. Family size is estimated based on an average of family size for the counts in 1991-1996.

²Shirley Weathers, Ph.D., *SCSO Report to the Governor: Poverty in Utah, Report to the Governor* (Salt Lake City: Community Services Office, July 1986), pp. 50-52.

The racial breakdown of homeless families is very similar to that of homeless individuals.

**RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS HOMELESS FAMILIES
31 JANUARY 1991-31 JANUARY 1998**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Caucasian</i>	<i>Hispanics</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Native Americans</i>	<i>Asian/PI</i>	<i>Multi-ethnic</i>	
1991	70%		11	7	11	0	N/A
1992	68		14	6	11	0	N/A
1993	64		9	12	9	3%	3%
1994	65		17	2	7	7	2
1995	64		13	8	8	2	5
1996	56		22	10	8	1	3
1997	47		18	8	10	2	15
1998	56		17	8	14	2	3

(The multiracial category was not used until 1993.)

The minority population in Utah is at risk of homelessness during income fluctuations. "Poverty among American Indians is most severe," according to *Poverty In Utah 1993*.³ Minorities are more likely to be homeless than other members of Utah's population, as becomes more obvious when we see what a low percentage of the total population non-Caucasians are. The following chart shows the racial origins of Utah and trends.⁴

UTAH POPULATION BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN 1980, 1990				
Race	1980 Persons	1980 % of Population	1990 Persons	1990 % of Population
Black	9,198	.6	10,321	.6
Am. Indian	18,155	1.3	23,812	1.4
Asian/Pac Is.	19,737	1.4	32,322	1.9
Other Race	26,379	1.8	36,196	2.1
Total Non-White	73,469	5.1	102,651	6.0
White	1,362,999	94.9	1,594,406	94.0
Total Persons	1,436,468	100.0	1,697,057	100.0
Hispanic	58,739	4.1	80,863	4.8

Sources: 1980 Census, PC80-1-C46, Utah, pp. 60-61, 70, 77; 1990 Census, STF 3A, Utah, Tables P119-120.

³Shirley A. Weathers, Ph.D., "Who is Poor?", in *Report to the Governor: Poverty in Utah 1993* (Salt Lake City: State Community Services Office, Department of Community and Economic Development, 1994), table 12 p. 20.

⁴Shirley A. Weathers, Ph.D., "Who is Poor?", in *Report to the Governor: Poverty in Utah 1993* (Salt Lake City: State Community Services Office, Department of Community and Economic Development, 1994), table 12 p. 20.

Using the July 1996 survey, the racial breakdown of homeless sheltered families by county reveals additional information. Salt Lake County has the most diverse sampling of homeless families. Forty-two of the families were Caucasian, followed by 16 Hispanic families and 10 African-American families. Native Americans made up 8 percent, Asians 1 percent, and the rest were multi-racial. Weber County reported that 55 percent of the families were Caucasian while 29 percent were Hispanic, 6 percent African-American, 6 percent Native American, and the remaining 4 percent Asian. Not surprisingly, Utah County had a high percentage of Caucasian families—67 percent—but there were only three homeless families reported.

In 1987, Utah was ranked first in the nation for household size with 3.19 persons per household. According to the 1990 Census, that number jumped to 3.67 persons per family. It is not surprising then that the homeless families sheltered in both January and July were close to the state average.

Of course family sized varied across the state, but the trend is toward larger families being homeless. Family size identified in the six point prevalence counts in the chart "Homeless Sheltered Family Size."

There are presently inadequate facilities in Utah for homeless families; urban shelters have family waiting lists.